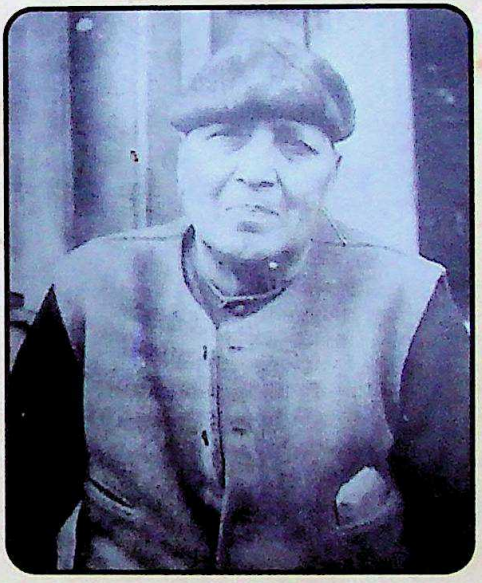
Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

KASHYAP BANDHU

Foremost Kashmiri Social Reformer and Freedom Fighter

A Tribute to the Leader



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Compiled by
Avtar Nehru and Team

Edited by
Dr. Kashinath Pandit

Team Essay and Jammu Institute of General Education and Rehabilitation (JIGAR)

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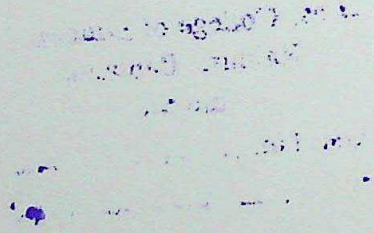

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J.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
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Team Essay
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Message

Dear Community members,

Namaskar. A century has gone by when Bandhu ji had begun a pioneering mission for the country and the community. He hailed from an ordinary rural family in South Kashmir. But there was the fire inside him, the fire of serving the people. He was the first to embrace Arya Samaj faith in Lahore where he had gone after resigning from a petty revenue department job.

Arya Samaj movement aimed drastic reforms in Hindu rites and rituals. As a young boy from Kashmir, Bandhu ji understood the need of a reformation of Kashmiri Hindu society. He got involved in the National freedom struggle which Congress was waging at the time. He loved Kashmir, the home of ancient culture and philosophy. He loved the Kashmiris for their simplicity, honesty and hard work. He was the first among Kashmiri Hindu intellectuals to protest against the high-handedness of Islamist fanatics who stoked communal fire in the political agitation of 1931.

Happy to know that a Kashmiri leader, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah had founded a "secular-democratic" party called National Conference, Bandhu ji joined it to serve the Kashmiri people as their dedicated compatriot. He liked its socialist programme and care for the peasant and

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the daily wager. But soon he found that the NC leadership was wearing a mask to hide its other face. He parted his way from it, and resolved to dedicate the rest of his life to the social reform work of his community. Kashmir Sentinel and Special Bandhu ji number of Vitasta published from Kolkata carry insights into his life and works.

His social reform mission encompassed Kashmiri Hindu community's traditional rites and rituals, dress code, particularly of women folks, widow remarriage, rejecting extravaganza of marriage feasts beyond the capacity of people, bringing political awareness and inculcating the sense of social responsibility, founding the youth organization Yuvak Sabha so as to acclimatise the Kashmir Hindu samaj to the political nuances of the day, his use of print media as a means of propagating his mission, his love for Kashmiri people and his popularity among the rural folks who sang songs in his praise and finally his selfless service dedicating his entire life to the cause of his community. This was Bandhu ji.

Our politicos have deliberately neglected him; they want to trivialize his name and work in the annals of national history in general, and state history in particular. This is unjust and unfair to the community, to the nation and to Bandhu ji himself. We need to revive and remember the services of patriotic persons like Bandhu ji.

We want more Bandhu ji's to come up from among our youth. Our community is an endangered one because of genocide and forced expulsion from the homeland. A society that remained knitted for thousands of years, has got scattered all over the globe now. This has brought us face to face with serious challenges.

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Our population is dwindling fast under severe economic strain which an exiled community is subjected to, our youth, both boys and girls, are getting overaged but still unable to find a suitable match, late marriages hinder establishment of smooth family life, and widow remarriage is again becoming a taboo. There is loss of faith in our indigenous culture among many community members, inter-cast marriages are becoming a compulsion, extravaganza at marriage, yagnopavit and other ceremonies are becoming much hated but voluntarily accepted compulsion leading to the consequential drain on the financial resources of the migrated community.

We want a new Bandhu ji to emerge from among the youth of our community. They have the capability to lead, and be sure the community is more than willing to follow a dedicated, selfless and visionary leadership of Bandhu ji's calibre.

Our youngsters have the capability, urge and will to initiate reforms at all levels; not only to initiate but also to streamline and implement these. Whatever is lost is lost but whatever can be redeemed should be redeemed now and particularly by our youth.

I, therefore, make a humble appeal to our youth, both males and females, to change the old mindset and think of drastic reforms of the community that will make it a respectable and decent community without the shackles of antiquarianism, and deeply attached to modern ways of life. Respect for the elders, service of the elders as a duty prescribed by our rich traditions, attaining excellence in knowledge, demonstrating leadership qualities in all walks of life and giving a new shape and semblance to the

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Kashmiri Hindu society, all this is an appeal which I would like to make to our youth. You are the inheritors of a great civilization and please try to know yourself.

God bless you

ॐ सहनाववतु सह नौ भुनक्तु। सहवीर्यं करवावहै।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै।
ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः।

(कृष्ण यजुर्वेद उपनिषद)

अर्थ — हम दोनों (गुरु और अन्तेवासी शिष्य) परस्पर मिलकर सुरक्षा करें। हम मिलकर खायें (देश में कोई भूखा न रहे)। हम साथ-साथ मिलकर शौर्य करें (राष्ट्र में परचक्र आने पर युद्ध करें)। हम (देश के संगठनरूपी तपश्चर्या से) उज्ज्वल एवं प्रदीप्त हों। हम पठित एवं अध्ययनशील हों, परस्पर द्वेष न करें तो (राष्ट्र में) शांति बनी रहेगी, यह विचार सत्य है।

॥ ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः ॥

Dr. Kashinath Pandit
(Padma Shri)

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Foreword

Welcome to this tribute to the illustrious son of the soil, the late Kashyap Bandhu ji. I am honoured and happy to write a complimentary to this monograph. Pandit Kashyap Bandhu has been one of the greatest leaders the Kashmiri Pandit community has produced. This monograph speaks of his rich contribution as an outstanding journalist, social reformer and political leader of Kashmir, which deserves to be recorded in golden letters. Bandhu ji had left Kashmir for Lahore as a young lad where he was influenced by the ideology of the Arya Samaj and joined Virjanand Ashram. Impressed by his dedication to the concept of social reform and strict adherence to Vedic teachings, Sri Vishwa Bandhu ji, Principal/Chief of the ashram, bestowed on the sobriquet of Kashyap Bandhu, the name by which millions of his compatriots in Kashmir came to know him. This incident proved a turning point in his life. Ever since, he did not looked back and worked tirelessly to ameliorate the condition of the weak and marginalized sections of society.

He is the pioneer of the social reform movement in Kashmir besides being an ardent lover of the people of Kashmir who had been the sufferers of ignorance, illiteracy and deprivation. It is in fitness of things that some dedicated members of the Kashmiri Hindu community have

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come together and undertaken the task of putting in black and white the life and contribution of this illustrious son of Kashmir so that our coming generations will read it and know how men of great vision, integrity and action walked the length and breadth of our motherland. Bandhu ji remained glued to the love of the motherland and its people, especially the poor and marginalized segment of society. Bandhu ji played a vital role in safeguarding the interests of the Hindu and Sikh minority communities of Kashmir. The contribution of Kashyap Bandhu to liberalised vision, progressive ideology, and concern for society will always remain a priceless chapter of Kashmirian history and ethos. It will serve as a source of inspiration for the new generation and at the same time will be a matter of great pride for the older folks, as well.

I extend my hearty acknowledgement to the compilers and the editor of this publication, particularly to Dr. Rajiv Bhat, the grandson of Pandit Kashyap Bandhu ji for extending full cooperation to the team of researchers who have worked on this important project. God bless us all.

Yogesh Munjal
Working President, Shri Maharshi Dayanand
Saraswati Smarak Trust, Tankara

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Preface

Kashmir in general, and the Valley in particular, is geographically a landlocked region. Despite the absence of easy connectivity, the region has produced scholars and intellectuals who contributed richly to the Indian civilizational fund. They enriched the land spiritually and philosophically.

Owing to its rich flora and fauna, pristine nature, snow-clad mountains, glaciers and large lush meadows, all conducive to a meditative culture, Kashmir came to be called the garden of sages and savants – the *Rishis*. It is also called the abode of Goddess Sharika or the goddess of learning.

The Hindu ruling dynasties ruled over the region for thousands of years. Kalhan Pandit has given us exciting history of ancient Kashmir in his celebrated history *Rajatarangini* written about CE 1149.

Kashmir's civilizational history changed around the middle of the 14th century CE when Muslim missionaries from Central Asian and Iranian regions made adventures in Kashmir. Civilizational changes are always far-reaching and replacement of millennia-old culture by a new one, which is alien in history, content and orientation can be tumultuous. The nearly 250 years rule of Sultans of Kashmir was often

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turbulent and violent because firstly Kashmir had lost political centrality and cultural cohesion. The Mughals made it a province (*suba*) and essentially a picnic spot of peace and pleasure. The Pathan and Sikh rule lasted nearly a quarter of a century but in no way brought economic and cultural relief to the people. One century of Dogra rule was autocratic in form but somewhat peaceful and non-turbulent because J&K like other princely states was a vassal state of the British Empire who had secured the northern borders of their Indian Empire.

The story of Kashmir's struggle for "secular and democratic" dispensation under the rubric of national freedom movement begun in the second decade of the 20th century and culminating in the wresting of power from the hands of a benign autocrat and passing it over to a band of power-hungry thugs by ending October 1947, is the post-independence sordid narrative of Kashmir.

Bandhu ji, like many naive people, was misled into this political thuggery for some time. However, he put himself on the corrective course before long and thus gained fame as the pioneer of social reformers of Kashmiri Hindu community. His patriotism stood in direct contrast to the parochialism from which he had managed to wriggle out. The primary trait of his character is his understanding of and distancing from narrow communal orientation that blurred the vision of even otherwise sensible Kashmiri leadership. He refused to fall in line with pseudo-patriots and carved his path independently.

Obviously, this dedicated social reformer cannot become part of the system that has dominated the Kashmir psyche for the last seven decades. He does not figure in the

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annals of contemporary history of Kashmir's "freedom fighting posse." Hence some friends have ventured to pull him out of oblivion. This monograph is the result of that effort. The youngsters of our community should know of their past.

Bandhu ji is not an isolated case. We have an envious list of social workers from the distant past down to the present day. But the need of the hour is to introduce their work and thought to the community in its present state of forced exile.

No son of the soil will overlook the contribution of Pandit Shri Bhat, the physician who cured Sultan Bud Shah of an ailment and restored him to health. When asked for remuneration, the proud Pandit requested for the return of the exiled members of his community and their rehabilitation including their culture. Who can forget the sacrifices made by Pandit Birbal Dhar in his effort of approaching the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh for the liberation of Kashmir from the clutches of tyrannical rule of the Pathans. Who will underestimate the contribution of the leading Shaivite philosopher, interpreter and spiritual guru namely Abhinav Gupta. Who will not feel proud of the unparalleled hermit Lal Eshwari who brought the teachings of Shaivism in her peculiar aphorisms that are still sung by Kashmiri Pandits on religious occasions. Pandit Parmanand and Pandit Krishna Joo Razdan are comparable to Rumi in their flight of their imagination in the domain of divinity.

Shri Bandhu ji instilled among the youth of the community a great sense of camaraderie and a sense of deep devotion and responsibility towards the community affairs. He was a multi-faceted personality; a social reformer, a

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journalist par excellence, a very mature political a leader who could always speak from a point of strength; a great speaker who always had his thumb on the pulse of the audience, a far-sighted administrator who could get things done even with a paucity of resources. Above all, he was a rebel – would not agree to anything from any source that he felt was detrimental to the interests of the community.

The community, by remembering so affectionately in these days of mass exodus speak volumes about the contribution made by Bandhu ji towards the community.

Naman to such bright star.

Trikuta Nagar, Jammu
10.08.2023

(Dr. Rajiv Bhat)

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Kashyap Bandhu: The Illustrious Reformer, Social Worker and Guiding Star of Kashmiri Hindu Community

संज्ञानसूक्तम आर्षवाणी संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम।
देवा भागं यथापूर्वे संजानाना उपासते ॥

पग से पग (कदम से कदम) मिलाकर चलो, स्वर में स्वर मिलाकर बोलो, तुम्हारे मनो में समान बोध हो। पूर्वकाल में जैसे देवों ने अपना भाग प्राप्त किया, सम्मिलित बुद्धि से कार्य करने वाले उसी प्रकार अपना अपना अभीष्ट प्राप्त करते हैं।

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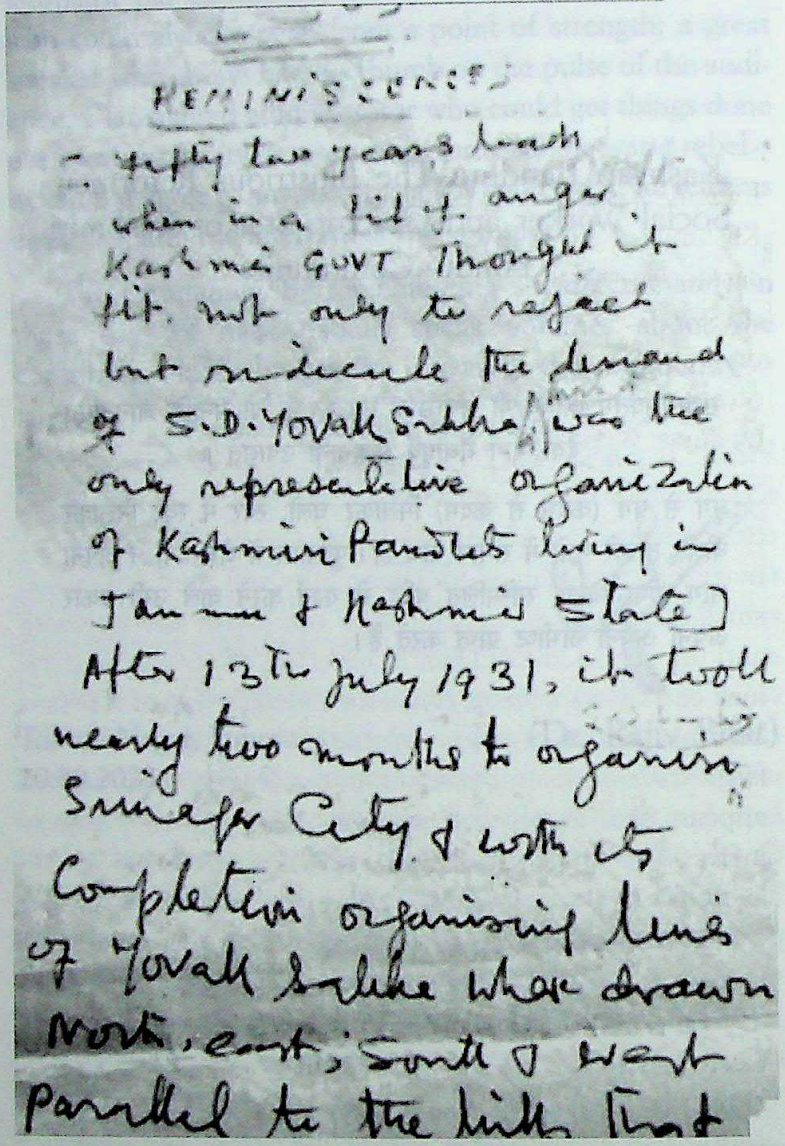

REMINISCENCES

- Fifty two years back when in a fit of anger Kashmir GOVT thought it fit not only to reject but ridicule the demand of S.D. YOVAK Sabha (as the only representative organization of Kashmiri Pandits living in Jammu & Kashmir State)

After 13th July 1931, it took nearly two months to organise Srinagar City & with its completion organising lines of YOVAK Sabha were drawn North, east, South & West parallel to the kitchen Road

A handwritten document of Bandhu ji.

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Introduction

Imagine for a minute travelling back (in a time machine) to Kashmir of the early 20th century as you see in popular cartoon shows. It is a completely different world. People are dressed differently, most of them with turbans as head dress, unkempt beards, loose and baggy body-wear mostly of home spun wool which cannot be called tidy and smart by any stretch of imagination.

Wait, you don't see the modern infrastructure of roads or roadside, the place looks primitive with a slow life. A maze of rough lanes dotted by wooden or grass thatched small houses, an occasional two-storeyed wooden structure, and the subdued hustle and bustle coming from a lazy bullock cart or a Tonga moving noisily along the unpaved road. You may find a casual group of men and women with the latter covered from head to toe in a black veil. Everything appears hard to believe. That is what our ancestral habitats in Kashmir looked like and that is the way our ancestors lived like.

Tyndale-Biscoe School

Cecil Earle Tyndale-Biscoe, the British missionary, who introduced western school education in Kashmir in late 1800s, had a tough time convincing people of Kashmir to enrol their kids in his school. Before he took the initiative, there existed *madrasas* and *pathshala*s for informal education

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in some of the towns and that, too, mainly for teaching language and a sprinkling of religious education.

Kashmiri Pandits were the first social group to take admission in the Tyndale-Biscoe School. Some years later, the Muslims also started joining the school. By early 1900, the practice of sending kids to the school for learning 3Rs had begun to be adopted and of culture of schooling had started generating interest among more receptive segments of society.

It was the period of Maharaja Pratap Singh, and his government was showing interest in creating progressive bent of mind among the people. Education had begun to spread out in the city and the towns of Kashmir. The fresh air of education was also blowing in the rural areas.

The social and political upheaval in the Indian subcontinent was felt everywhere as the freedom movement spanned not just political activities but provided more opportunity for literary and cultural groupings, renaissance, social reforms and mobility of people. The youth naturally engaged more and lent it lot of energy.

Tarachand Bhat nee 'Koul', who later on became famous as Kashyap Bandhu and Bulbul of Kashmir, was actually a product of this socio-cultural churning. When an opportunity came his way of playing meaningful role in the area of social awakening and reform, he took the time by forelock. He had found his people steeped in backwardness, deprivation and ignorance. This aroused in him the sense of responsibility of carrying a huge burden of reforming the society. He did it in a way that Kashmiri Pandits found in him a torchbearer, emancipator, reformer and political voice – all

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in one. In fact, the yesteryear generations cheered him as the Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Kashmir for his role in fostering path breaking social reforms in the Kashmiri Pandit society in modern history.

Many reformers, social workers and political activists have preferred not to be brought under highlight but work silently towards the emancipation of their community. Bandhu ji was one in this category of activists. He has not been given his due place in the history of contemporary Kashmir. But when more and more research will be made, people will come to know what a man of integrity and dedication Bandhu ji was.

Now let's know about this illustrious son of Kashmir and his multifaceted personality, who, in true sense of the term, qualifies to be called known as the pioneer of a social reform movement in Kashmir. His leadership, vision, and role in giving a shape to the concept of Naya Kashmir will be written in letters of gold.

Early Life

Born as Tarachand Bhat to Thakur Bhat in Gairo (Nurpura, Tral) in South Kashmir on 24 March 1899, he was adopted by his widowed aunt and so his surname changed to Koul from Bhat. He went to the local *maktab* (school) and showed a lot of interest in studies. Finding that he had great interest in studies, his family arranged for his admission in Sri Pratap High School, Srinagar because educational facility was not available in his native place. He had to shift to the capital city of Srinagar if he desired to pursue studies. He had developed taste for literature besides

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evincing interest in contemporary history and politics. He would write opinionated poems in his mother tongue. These were simple in diction and about commonplace themes. He used the pen-name of 'Bulbul'. Eventually, his poetry won the appreciation of ordinary people, farm labourers, wage earners, craftsmen, shawl weavers etc. He received recognized and came to be known in entire valley as 'Bulbul'.

Those were the times when Kashmir was reeling in poverty. Like most of the people, he too hailed from a poor and deprived family. Therefore, after passing matriculation examination, he looked out for a livelihood and got the job of a *Shajrakash* (assistant to patwari) in the revenue department. Though he didn't like the job, but before long, he became a darling of his seniors and was assigned important duties, including functioning as a guide escorting VIPs at times.

Self-Exile from Kashmir

Tarachand was gifted with the faculty of observing things keenly. He evinced deep interest in the social, cultural and economic conditions of the people very minutely. The pen and poetry became his tools through which he fearlessly expressed his opinions without caring for the consequences. The same bold nature cost him his job.

Sometime in 1921, while he was lauded for his enterprising work by his seniors and visitors, he, once, advised a local village headman not to heed the order from the superiors of lighting the route of the local Zaildar meaning 'the area noble'. The noble and his wife were to go for a feast and the subjects were ordered to lit the route by burning

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straw torches. He had found that it was a cruel and unnecessary practice thrust on the poor village folks against their free will. The authorities came to know about it and an inquiry was ordered. Sensing his imminent arrest, Tarachand went underground and fled Kashmir. He made to Quetta (now in Pakistan). There he formally began writing career under the pen-name of Bulbul. During his self-imposed exile, fond memories of his home caused him pin and yearning for return to his native environs. In a famous poem, written while sitting on the bank of river Lora, he said:

Ae aab-e-roode Loura ... itni ho mehrbani
Jab Sind beh kar aay Jhelum say tuj mein paani
Mere taraf say usko ... chhaati say tu lagana
Ro ro kar usko mere ... phir dastaan sunana
Kehna use Khuda ra, ay aab-roode- Jhelum ...
Shaida hai door tera, gurbat mein tuj say chhut kar ...
Godi mein jis ko tum nay pala tha, misle-madr ... Voh dukh utha raha hai
Gurbat mein tuj say chhut kar ... voh dukh utha raha hai

Bulbul na yeh vasiyaat ahbab bhool jayen ... Ganga kay badlay mere Jhelum mein phool jayen (*instead of Ganges, my ashes be immersed in Jhelum*).

As Kashyap Bandhu

The city of Lahore in the pre-independence period and earlier has been a hub of political, business, trade and cultural activities besides being a higher education centre in

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the whole of pre-partitioned north-west India. It has served as the capital of several kingdoms including Sikhs under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who also ruled over Kashmir for years before the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar between the British and Dogra king Raja Gulab Singh. The modern State of Jammu and Kashmir was born from the Treaty of Amritsar.

This historical development stimulated the movement of people, trade, culture and ideologies from the Lahore metropolis to Kashmir and vice-versa. By 1900, Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement against orthodoxy and outdated rituals/customs, had already bloomed in Lahore. Propagation of Vedic supremacy, values and philosophy fuelling social reforms like rejecting caste division, encouraging widow remarriage and women's education. Arya Samaj had set up Gurukul ashrams and used mass media like newspapers and other tools to advance its reformation mission.

Against this backdrop, Tarachand 'Bulbul', who was in Quetta for a couple of years, was being noticed for his writings, poetry, and commentaries in the local press and also by the Lahore-based Arya Samaj functionaries. Sri Vishwa Bandhu ji, the chief/principal of Virjanand Ashram at that time, was very much impressed by Tarachand's genius and invited him to Lahore for work in the Arya Gazette.

Once in Lahore, Tarachand 'Bulbul' started moving in the circle of poets (including Allama Iqbal), writers, intellectuals, freedom fighters and other luminaries in the bustling city. He tried his best to understand and feel what the virtues like humanism, piety, and love were. As part of Arya Samaj's team and due to his journalistic pursuits, he quickly transformed into a volunteer, reformer, and thinker. He also joined Shaheed Bhagat Singh's revolutionary part

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and was briefly detained in the murder case of Assistant Superintendent Saunders, in which Shaheed Bhagat Singh and others were implicated and later on were martyred.

It was again in Lahore that he married a fellow Arya Samaj worker, Bimla ji Dutt, a Punjabi, who later played an important role in the education of girls in the state.

Tarachand was intensely pained to see the deplorable condition of the Kashmiri labourers who used to migrate to Lahore in search of livelihood during the winter season. He strove hard for the rights of these Kashmiri labourers. Through his forceful writings in Akhbar-e-Aam, Bahar-e-Kashmir, Akhbar Kashmiri, and some other local dailies of Lahore, Kashyap Bandhu raised his voice against the atrocities perpetrated against the people of his community. He not only sensitized these ignorant and illiterate workers but also organized them and started the Kashmiri Mazdoor Board (Labour Board) and himself became its secretary. To make this board more effective, he seldom missed receiving inspiration from the famous thinker and poet Dr. Iqbal. News about this board started appearing in Lahore and other newspapers of the country and a huge session of the board was organized in Ludhiana in which Motilal Nehru gave a very fiery speech about the plight of Kashmiris. The slogan 'Kashmir for Kashmiris' was raised for the first time from this platform.

On witnessing his strong bond with his native land of Kashmir and feelings for his fellow Kashmiri labourers, Arya Samaj's Sri Vishwa Bandhu conferred upon Tarachand Bulbul a new title viz. 'Kashyap Bandhu' – friend of Kashmiris. He also advised him to get involved in Samaj's work in Kashmir, where its seeds had already been sown by

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a few Kashmiri Pandits like Janki Nath Vidyarthi and Madhu Ram Gigoo.

Kashmir Calling

In the year 1930-31, a major political development took place in Kashmir – a political party by the name of the Muslim Conference was formed. Though this party was essentially formed to take up the issue of freedom of Muslims from Dogra rule, its communal undertone was fairly exposed in the first major protest it held for the release of its leaders who were languishing in jail. The protesting Muslim Conference mob in Srinagar went out of control and resorted to violence, rioting and looting of Kashmiri Pandit shops on July 13, 1931. Ironically, the Muslim Conference leadership earmarked 13 July as Martyrs Day (*Yum-e-Shohada*) when those who were made a victim of the loot and arson were the local Hindus, particularly of the Zainakadal locality.

Owing to the gravity of the situation in Kashmir, and also on the insistence of a group of Kashmiri Pandits, Kashyap Bandhu returned to Kashmir in 1931. He was already familiar with the condition of the State, particularly the Kashmiri Pandits, through his contacts. After returning to Kashmir, he along with towering Pandit leadership of the day, including Pandit Prem Nath Bazaz, Shiv Narain Fotedar, Jia Lal Kilam and others, founded the "Yuvak Sabha" at Sheetal Nath shrine in Srinagar. It was the beginning of an eventful journey of the Pandit community marked by the emergence of some political and social reformative activities impacting society and polity in many ways.

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Social Reforms: Towards Modernity

Some enlightened souls among the Kashmiri Hindus were already introduced to the Arya Samaj movement that rose in Lahore in those days. With Bandhu ji's arrival, the movement intensified. He localized the context of social reforms and adopted a strategy of galvanizing the public into action through these reforms. He realized that there could not be a prospect of emancipation of the Kashmir Hindu community unless much-needed social reforms were introduced. He found that the poor and unsuspecting Hindus were burdened by the weight of superfluous rituals and customs, a legacy inherited by the community from the hoary past but obsolete and redundant in the eyes of contemporary times undertook comprehensive discussions with the community elders to convince them that the forward march of the community was arrested by sticking like a leech to uninspiring past and senseless social customs. The Pandits needed to change with the changing times if they wished to survive as a respectable social entity.

Female Attire

Of many social reforms that Bandhu ji introduced in Hindu society, the change in the dress code of Kashmiri Hindu women is still fresh and talked about extensively in the Pandit families. The dress in vogue with Kashmiri women, Hindus as well as Muslims was one introduced by the Mughal rulers after they conquered Kashmir in CE 1586. The huge baggy overwear was called *pheran* which is a distortion of the Farsi word *peerahan* meaning a dress. In contemporary Iranian, *peerahan* means a shirt.

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This was a huge, baggy and cumbersome overwear making the wearer look untidy and primitive.

Of all his social reforms, this reform is being still remembered for its success in orthodox society. Bandhu ji was convinced that while women needed to be educated if the society was to be modernized and at the same time her dress, thinking, and approach to life also needed to be changed to suit the needs of the hour. From baggy and ugly overdress called pheran, the shift to the use of saree and its components was quickly accepted by the Pandit women-folk. This also necessitated the ease of a new head dress which service was rendered by a shawl of decent make and embroidery work. This was a way of promoting modern ideas among Kashmiri Pandits and sanitizing them towards looking smart and elegant.

Thanks to Bandhu ji and his initiative of focusing on the reform of women's dress code and effacing the traces of a slavish dress imposed by the Mughal rulers. With smart saree dress, women folks could easily perform all the house-hold chores she was supposed to do with undue restrictions on physical movement. Apart from being a hurdle in the routine work, the reformers argued against the headgear saying it was unhygienic and a cause of dirt on necks. As it was worn for long hours and days together, the shabby dress would collect dirt because of sweating and dust.

However, old habits die hard. There were also conservative elites within the society who liked to remain glued to obsolete customs and ways of life. It is always difficult to handle these antiquarians. Bandhu ji sent his deputies to towns and villages to propagate the use of new dress for women folks. He would visit community gatherings speak directly to people and convince them that the change was

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inevitable. Wherever he went, he was shown great respect as the community leader and a social guide. People loved him and in rural South Kashmir, village folks, men and women sang his songs that inspired hope and goodwill among the people. He had become the man of the masses.

The thrust was a saree for married women and a kameez/salwar for girls. The subject became so trendy as to evoke competition among composers in simple Kashmiri folklore. One of the very popular songs was this:

Trave Pheran teh lo lo (Oh dear! Give up wearing the pheran)
Zooj, poots tye nervaar (Give up zooj, poots and nervssr)
Yim chi shikasaek sardaar (for these are the harbingers of squalor)
maleh baerthaey gardan (these collect much on your neck area)
Travee Pheran lo lo (Abandon the pheran, O dear!)

Kashyap Bandhu's attempt at reform was sometimes met with sarcasm.

taaraachand bulbulo trawoo israar (Tarachand, O! Bulbul stop chattering)
aes na baa traawaw z'nhtih naerwaar (for we will never leave our gown precious worn around the collar)

This Kashmiri group song (*Vanvun*) composed in favour of social reform in those days became a fad.

"*Traavi zooj, poots neri vodnaniye*
Chuy mubarak Doti mahreniye... (Cast aside the hackneyed dress, and be smarter, tie the Sari Oh! Blessed bride!)

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Widow Re-marriage

Widow remarriage has been a socially repulsive practice in Kashmir's conservative Hindu society since olden days. Women rendered widows at an early age had to live a miserable life because they became fully dependent on either their in-laws or their parents. Kashyap Bandhu started the widow remarriage movement with much dedication and propagated it extensively along with other volunteers. Any volunteers who worked with him opted to marry widows and in this way, he laid the practice of reforming Pandit society of a debilitating social discrepancy.

No Food Wastage

In the Hindu society of those days, people were given to wasteful expenditures during marriage and other social ceremonies. Some feasts are extended to several days incurring unnecessary expenditure. To stop all this, Bandhu ji and his colleagues started picketing and used to sit on *dharnas* wherever lavish feasts were served. He requested the people to limit the number of invitees and stop wasting money and foodstuff. He also advocated limiting the number of preparations on such occasions and refraining from giving huge dowries. Perhaps the affluent section could afford the luxuries but mostly the Pandits were below the poverty line and they hailed this part of social reform as highly appreciable. Bandhu ji never used undesirable methods of enforcing the reforms but motivated the people through advice and persuasion to break bad customs and habits. Of course, he received kudos for this great work.

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Female Education

The greatest contribution of Kashyap Bandhu is to popularize female education in the community. It was during that time that Vasanta Girls Schools came into existence. It revolutionised society and Hindu girls saw a great future opening for them through education. We owe it to him that our women folk have taken to education and are not lagging in any field today.

Social Outreach and Consolidation

His contribution to the weekly Yatra to Maa Sharika mandir atop Hari Parbat became the basis for filling the Pandit youth with a sense of dedication towards the development of a healthy community. Many among the youth in question became torch-bearers in a struggle for social reforms like ensuring widow remarriage, restraining expenses for marriage functions, restricting the number of invitees to marriage and other parties and reducing the quantum of foodstuff served to the public on occasions of feasts and festivals. He said that the Pandit society could not afford the luxuries and should not indulge in them.

Looking at the challenges in organizing the KP community and broadening the base of volunteers, Kashyap Bandhu started weekly gatherings on Sundays at Hari Parbat where the community people used to assemble in large numbers. He shared his ideas with the congregation. Yajnas (*havans*) were also performed. This was done to foster unity and brotherhood among Pandit community members.

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Infused with the idea of rendering practical help to the destitute widows, he started collecting contributions and donations, both in kind and cash, to help widows. The program was called *Mochchi Phol*. His volunteers used to visit every house to collect rice and other things just to give solace to the economically and socially backward persons. He started 'Silai Kendra' (tailoring centres) to give training to the needy widows so that they could sustain themselves. Out of donated funds, he would buy the tailoring machines and distribute these among the deserving destitute.

Along with setting up the Sanatan Dharam Yuvak Sabha, which became a centre of Kashmiri Pandit social reform and political activities in the 1930s, Kashyap Bandhu helped establish the first newspaper by the Hindu (Pandit) community in Kashmir. On February 1, 1931, a newspaper titled *Martand* was published which became the mouthpiece of Yuvak Sabha. Kashyap Bandhu had the distinction of being its first editor. Later on, owing to his efforts it got its press. Through his column *challant,* he reflected on the pressing issues of the day and inspired the people to action. This newspaper became very popular all-over Northern India. From 1931 to 1969, this newspaper continued to be published regularly. Owing to the continuous and dedicated efforts of Kashyap Bandhu, the newspaper set a record in the history of journalism in Kashmir. A good number of Kashmiri writers expressed themselves through the Martand under the editorship of Kashyap Bandhu. Prominent among them were: Premnath Pardesi, Master Zinda Kaul, Dinanath Nadim, Mahjoor Kashmiri, Arjundev Majboor, Shyamlal Wali, Teeth Kashmiri, Prof. Nandlal Kaul Talib, and Dinanath Almast Kashmiri etc. All of them occupy an

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envious place in the list of eminent intellectuals of the community.

Later on, after joining the National Conference, he started the daily *Kesri*. His editorial piece would be published under the name *Pagal ki Diary*. He had a very interesting way of conveying his views sarcastically. When Kesri was banned by the Maharaja's government, he started the daily *Desh*. All these dailies were published in Urdu language because Urdu was mostly read by the people in Kashmir and it was also the official language of the state.

Political Voice

Kashyap Bandhu, a dedicated leader and a man of conviction in the true sense of the term chose the right opportunity to advance political inclusion and empowerment of Kashmiri Pandits. In 1932, Bandhu ji met Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, who was then the President of the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference. The purpose of this meeting was to create a joint platform of Hindus and Muslims so that a vigorous movement could be launched to find a solution to political problems and also discuss the formation of a responsible government. In August 1938, the 'National Demand' (Quami Demand) came into force and started a truly inclusive freedom struggle. Sheikh Abdullah, Maulana Masoodi, Mirza Afzal Baig, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Kashyap Bandhu, Jialal Kilam, Premnath Bazaz, Shambhunath Peshin and Sardar Buddh Singh became the more prominent faces of the freedom movement in Kashmir. Muslim Conference became the National Conference.

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Roti Agitation

In between, he played a pivotal role in the Roti Agitation of 1933-34 which aimed at the empowerment of Kashmiri Pandits and fought against the discrimination being meted out to the community in Government jobs. The state subject concept was born as a result.

Political Career Remained Obscured

His political career remains least discussed though his contribution to the development of the National Conference was next to none. He dared to speak to the Sheikh on issues of disagreement. There were many occasions during the formative years of the National Conference when he would speak from a position of strength looking eye to eye with his dissenters. He would even walk out on occasion but was always persuaded by his trusted friend Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg to return to the fold. He remained loyal to the party and was arrested even in 1953 along with the Sheikh and Beg. During his association with the provisional government and then the first democratic government, he accepted a token of rupees one as his monthly salary.

After his release in 1957, he was repeatedly invited by Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad to join the Government. But he declined. Strangely, though he also refused to join the Sheikh Government in the year 1975 when he was invited by the Sheikh himself. He was arrested several times between 1936 and 1948 by the Maharaja government along with the Sheikh and Beg and other colleagues. There are many anecdotes about his life in jail at Kud, Bhadarwah and Srinagar.

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As Relief Commissioner

In the aftermath of the Pakistan-sponsored tribal raid of 1947-48, in which thousands of Pandit and Sikh families were affected by massacres, arson, loot and mass conversion at the hands of these raiders aided by many locals in Baramulla, Muzaffarabad and Kupwara districts, Kashyap Bandhu was appointed as the Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation officer by the interim government of Sheikh Abdullah. His painstaking work of restoring the shattered confidence of victims and visits to all Pandit villages, even today make him a model officer. His wise handling of this enormous tragedy and refugee situation not only diffused the situation but also brought back Kashmiri Pandit as a strong community in these areas.

A Suave Administrator and Lobbyist

Kashyap Bandhu's contribution to rural development as Director General Dehat Sudhar after the formation of the Democratic government should not be left unsaid. The paucity of funds could not become a roadblock for him as he introduced Halla-shari (voluntary contribution by way of physical labour). Through *halla-sheri*, later known as *shram dhan*, he motivated prospective engineers to ensure the construction of a large number of rural roads and irrigation channels throughout the valley under the Panchayat system.

He is also credited for converting the low-lying, water-logged area of Sumbal into a liveable place called Sonawari. Then as a Project Officer in 1964, he virtually created Sonawari as a successful rural development model by constructing a barrier for Wular water that submerged the

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area perennially. By planting lakhs of trees, laying the building and road plans and other blocks, Sonawari soon transformed into a fertile rice field and a flourishing block.

The Sunset

Kashyap Bandhu lived a life of forced aloofness in his ancestral home at Gairoo until his last day. He mastered the Sanskrit language after he was 70+. Utilized the time for reading our Sanskrit manuscripts until he departed for his heavenly abode in 1985. Though he is no more among us but his outstanding work and life continue to inspire and motivate people even today. His contribution and ideals will surely make all generations of Kashmiris proud. He was a true son of the soil, a well-wisher of the community and a dedicated freedom fighter.

Adieu Bandhu ji.

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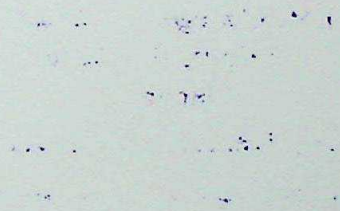

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Pandit Kashyap Bandhuji was born in a peasant family in their mud house. A first generation school attendee rose like a meteor on the socio-political scenario of Kashmir valley. He ensured changes in the set social norms of Kashmiri Pandits. Changed gender bias in favour of women folk. Ensured political participation of Pandit community along with the majority Muslims during the political turbulance of 1931-1953. He was a born reformist, a journalist par excellence, a sagacious political leader and a very tough administrator. His foot prints can be seen throughout the 20th century socio-political canvas of the valley.

JIGER – Jammu Institute of General Education and Rehabilitation, a registered NGO Committed to education and empowerment of specially abled and underpriviledged children and women across the State. Also working with other organisations to promote para sport and recreational opportunities for specially abled atheletes. JIGER was awarded Nari Shakti Samman by President of India in 2020.

TEAM ESSAY strives to provide an intellectual actively for school going children of Kashmir origin throughout the world, but in phases, as per energy, involvement and acceptability of the society in general. All this has to be accomplished while remaining totally equidistant from everything with a pure academic intellectual intent. Hope we all contribute and play our role for the generations to come as enlightened Humans.

Dr Kashinath Pandit, originally from Baramulla, has a PhD in Iranian Studies, which is his area of specialization. He retired from Kashmir University as Director of the Centre of Central Asian studies. He has won the President of India's Award for Classical Studies and was also awarded Padma Shri by the President of India in 2017. He has authored about ten works on Kashmir and the region.

Team Essay and Jammu Institute of General Education and Rehabilitation (JIGAR)
Regd. No. 1193 - s Society Act
Sector 4, Gangyal Garden, Jammu - 180010

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